



Managers as Coaches: Fostering Employee Commitment and Superior Performance

I recently interviewed 20 managers and supervisors about their training and development needs. I asked them about their greatest challenges and the non-technical skills that would make their day-to-day supervision easier and more effective. Two distinct needs emerged—performance coaching and managing conflict.

Performance coaching is the help a manager provides to employees in analyzing their performance and other job behaviours for the purpose of increasing job effectiveness. Lacking the skills to discuss performance improvement requirements, most managers choose to ignore poor performance and hope that problems will disappear. Of course, this rarely happens, and sometimes ingrained poor performance becomes both a habit and a source of great frustration for everyone in the organization. Timely coaching contributes significantly to productivity improvement.

While most performance feedback conversations occur in conjunction with the annual performance review, timely coaching sessions throughout the year contribute significantly to productivity improvement and heightened motivation. If done well, a coaching conversation conveys concern and interest in the employee's success.

In turn, this creates an environment that supports and values the individual. When employees feel supported and valued, they are more committed to the job and have a more positive attitude toward the workplace.

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Conducting a Coaching Meeting

The goal of a coaching conversation is to help employees develop and grow within the business. There are some key steps to follow to have a successful performance-feedback conversation that will be well received and result in changes.

After preparing for the meeting, which includes collecting samples of the behaviour or actions that need improvement, invite the employee to join you for a short, private conversation.

The conversation itself will have three phases—rapport building, exploring and diagnosing, and action planning. In phase one, the desired outcome is to set the employee at ease and to establish a comfortable environment, thereby

encouraging two-way dialogue and the exchange of information, as well as mutual problem-solving.

Set the tone by postponing phone calls, closing the door, and thanking the individual for joining you. Listening skills are crucial. Eye contact and body language convey your interest in a two-way conversation focused on a successful outcome. Oral communication skills such as paraphrasing, open-ended questioning, and reflecting the employee's message contribute to success.

The second phase—exploring and diagnosing—can begin with a thoughtful outline of the behaviour or action requiring improvement, and an investigation with the employee about the possible causes of the difficulties. It is critical to help employees examine for themselves the possible barriers to their performance. Invite the employee to offer suggestions about how to resolve the problem or, at the very least, to work with you to find appropriate corrective actions.

Employees sometimes need to be reminded about a job's expected outcome. Occasionally they need to be taught how to do part of a job they don't fully understand. The help you could

give may be technical; it may be the mediation between departments; or it could even be resolving a misunderstanding between the two of you. Communicate your interest in the employee's success.

The final phase of a coaching conversation is action planning. This is where you and the employee plan the specific action steps designed to solve the performance problems. A number of alternatives and their advantages and disadvantages may be examined. Help the employee choose the best alternative and set up a step-by-step program aimed at improvement. Establish a schedule that will include a review of progress and possible change to the step-by-step plan.

One of the most important parts of this final stage is communicating your support for, and interest in, the employee's success. Finish the meeting by thanking the employee for discussing the issues with you, and express your genuine hopes for the person's future achievement. Invite the employee to let you know how he or she feels about the discussion, and work toward finishing on a high note.

Performance coaching is a core-management task. Managing others in a way that conveys your commitment to their success will be reflected in the commitment and motivation they will offer in return. ▲

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Dr. Bernard Hoeter

The Origins of "Mentor" and "Coach"

The word "mentor" originates from Greek methodology. Goddess Athena spoke through Mentor, a respected Italian nobleman, to give advice to young Telemachus, son of Odysseus and Penelope, whose father was roaming the Aegean seas in search of his homeland. Today, "mentor" denotes a wise and trusted councillor.

"Coach," on the other hand, emanates from mediaeval student slang. A coach (originally a carriage) was a private tutor who prepared students for their examinations. (He was the "carriage" who drove them through their tests.) "Coaching" today means to instruct, to train.

All academic students gain basic knowledge of their professions by listening to an educator and reading relevant books mirroring the distilled knowledge of their calling. Book wisdom and lectures form the foundation of every study program.

But students also need the living touch of savant practitioners, mentors, coaches, and role models whom they should try to emulate. The mentor/coach helps students and young practitioners by sharing his or her empirical knowledge. By doing so, the mentor frequently becomes an admired friend and life-long role model. ▲

Mentoring, Coaching, & Role Modelling

Professor Bob Reid: Role Model for Learning

In Professor Reid's 28-year teaching career, his primary teaching has been to law students at the UBC Faculty of Law. He has taught Property law to first-year law students, real estate transactions to upper-year law students, and faculty of Commerce and Business Administration real estate courses to agents and salespeople. In Fall 2002, Bob taught the Real Property course to paralegal students at Capilano College.

Bob was involved in the early development of our BC Notary Preparatory Course, which he also teaches at UBC; in fact, he wrote the mortgage law section. Bob has presented tutorials and seminars both to Notary students and experienced Notaries.

He enjoys the challenge and the opportunity to meet and help people achieve their career goals. He is quick to say he has learned much from his students over the years, especially the First Nations students.

"The challenge in teaching arises when you want to impart to your students a basic understanding of the issues and principles of law being discussed in that class. Moreover, you want them to understand how the principles or issues apply in the wider concept of practice or the real world outside the classroom.

"And, most important, you want your students to challenge and discuss how these principles are applied in decisions. What other arguments can be made? Was the judge correct? You want students to think about the issues and principles, not simply memorize the lecture. You want them to feel they have learned something important and useful." ▲